

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

10 April 1962

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Qasin's Troubles in Kurdistan\*

SUMMARY

With the arrival of good weather, rebel Kurdish tribesmen have resumed harassment of army and police units in northern Iraq. The Kurds themselves lack the ability to challenge the government's authority outside of their own tribal areas. However, we cannot rule out the possibility that an Iraqi army column might push its way too far into the hills and get trapped, thereby resulting in a dramatic defeat for the government which could stimulate efforts within the military to overthrow Qasin.

It seems most likely that this summer will see a longer and probably more serious repetition of last year's indecisive skirmishing with Kurds harassing the government and the latter

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\* This memorandum was discussed with OCI and DD/P.

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responding with military force to maintain its position and prestige. Over the long run, attrition will probably begin to tell on the rebels and they will gradually lose effectiveness.

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1. Although spring has barely arrived in Kurdistan there are signs that perhaps Mulla Mustafa Barzani may give Qasim some real trouble this year. Sporadically through the winter Barzani's forces have engaged Iraqi police patrols and inflicted casualties. Between clashes, Qasim has shown willingness to discuss an amnesty, but the Barzanis -- flushed with success and thoroughly enjoying the fight -- have demanded more concessions than Baghdad is willing to grant. Around the middle of March an Iraqi army unit rode into an ambush north of Mosul and lost more than a dozen killed. Another unit was ambushed on 1 April and lost much of its equipment and transport. Qasim has again used his air force and has substantially reinforced the Second Division in Iraqi Kurdistan.

2. From these signs it would appear that the pattern of last summer has already begun again. Given its size and amount

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of heavy equipment, the Iraqi Army should have no particular difficulty keeping the main roads in northern Iraq open. It will probably be able to keep most of the secondary road net open by means of vigorous patrolling and by air action. Conversely, rebel Kurdish forces will be able to harass the government by raids on police posts, by temporarily establishing roadblocks in strategic places and by disturbances in some of the towns. The rebels have the option of retreating into the rugged uninhabited hills and mountains, where they are virtually immune from serious pursuit. The Iraqi Army has in the past shown a notable reluctance to get off its transport and footslog over tough terrain in the face of snipers who know the country.

3. Thus the situation is essentially a fluid one, subject to sudden turns which might conceivably produce a drastic outcome. Although the Kurds themselves lack the ability to challenge the government's authority outside of their own tribal areas, we cannot rule out the possibility that an army column might push its way too far into the hills and get trapped, thereby resulting in a dramatic defeat for the government which could stimulate efforts within the military to overthrow Qasim. Continued Kurdish harassment might induce Qasim to resolve the problem by granting

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the Kurds a degree of autonomy, extending amnesties, and agreeing to other of Barzani's demand -- in effect acknowledging that much of the Kurdish area is already beyond his effective reach. On the other hand, Qasim might be able to break the back of the revolt if the Barzani forces strayed or were maneuvered into a position in which the army could deal them a serious blow. Nothing succeeds like success, and hitherto much of the rebel strength has derived from the relative impunity with which the Kurds have shot up police posts and military convoys.

4. On balance, it is most likely that this summer will see a longer and probably more serious repetition of last year's indecisive skirmishing with Kurds harassing the government and the latter responding with military force to maintain its position and prestige. Over the long run, attrition will probably begin to tell on the rebels and they will gradually lose effectiveness. There is a chance -- perhaps one in four -- however, that the Kurds might achieve a dramatic success which would react on Qasim. In short, the "sole Leader" doesn't have to worry about Barzani invading Baghdad. But he has to keep control of the roads and administrative centers in the north and he can't afford to have a

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couple of battalions of Iraq's bravest and boldest slaughtered  
in the mountains.

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SHERMAN KENT  
Chairman

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